

K-State's NCAA tournament seeding at stake Saturday

By TATE STEINLAGE
THE COLLEGIAN

Losing three out their last four games, the K-State men's basketball team is close to being on the outside looking in of the Big 12 conference title race.

But when the No. 15 Texas Longhorns roll into Bramlage Coliseum Saturday for a marquee matchup, the Wildcats will have much more than a regular season championship to play for.

As of Jan. 30, ESPN college basketball analyst Joe Lunardi has K-State slotted as an eighth seed in the South Region of March's NCAA Tournament. The likelihood of that position being correct will depend particularly on how well the Wildcats play in their next five games.

That stretch will include matchups against the Longhorns and Kansas Jayhawks in Manhattan, and road contests against the Baylor Bears and Oklahoma Sooners. It'll also feature two storylines: can K-State maintain their spolless home court record in Big 12 play, and can the Wildcats finally have success on the road?

But how important is all of this for the postseason? Well, the difference between an eighth and

seventh seed can be staggering. The difference between an eighth and, say, 12th or 13th? Brutal.

If the tournament started today, K-State would be matched up against a dangerous Florida State squad (RPI: 38) that has played the ACC close all season.

A major slip up between now and March could make it even worse. Staying in the South Region, seeds 11-14 may mean facing the likes of Creighton, Louisville, St. Louis, or even Florida.

However, all of this will also depend on how K-State shows at the Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship in Kansas City, Mo., March 12-15.

As of today, K-State would enter the tournament a fifth seed. That spot begins play in the quarterfinals against the fourth seed, which would currently be the Iowa State Cyclones.

The Wildcats are in position to make a run in the next month and earn as high as a second seed, though they also have the possibility of falling all the way to the seventh seed. This would require them to play their way into the quarterfinals.

Wherever they fall, their performance in Kansas City will weigh heavily on their NCAA Tournament seeding. According



West Virginia forward Devin Williams attempts to work around junior forward Thomas Gipson during the first half of the Wildcats' 78-56 beatdown of the Mountaineers Saturday in Bramlage Coliseum.

to Team Rankings, K-State has a 32 percent chance of advancing to the semifinals and a 10 percent chance of reaching the finals.

An early exit could prove costly, while even just one win can mean the difference between one seed and another. How's that for March Madness?

While the importance of defending a Big 12 title goes without saying, this K-State squad has



TIPOFF

12:30 p.m. Bramlage Coliseum



Sophomore forward D.J. Johnson and senior forward Shane Southwell attempt to block a shot from Iowa State senior guard DeAndre Kane during the second half of K-State's 81-75 loss to the Cyclones Jan. 25 in Hilton Coliseum at Ames, Iowa. Johnson came away with the defensive rebound.

K-State to host No. 15 Texas after midweek break

By JOHN ZETMEIR
THE COLLEGIAN

The midweek bye could not have come at a better time for the K-State Wildcats who will square off with the No. 15 Texas Longhorns Saturday in Bramlage Coliseum. K-State (15-7, 5-4 Big 12) enters the game as losers of three of their last four games.

"A lot of guys have been resting," freshman guard Marcus Foster said. "We were easy on our legs Monday and Tuesday. It was definitely a relief, our bodies are all beat-up."

The Wildcats, who got off to a quick start in Big 12 competition, are in need of a big win to get them back on track. After a 4-1 start in conference play, which had the Wildcats sitting in second place, K-State have dropped four of their last five road games. Saturday's matchup with the Longhorns not only offers a chance for the Wildcats to get back on track, but the chance to grab a win over the team in second place in the Big 12.

"No matter what, you want to protect home court and that's what we've talked about," head coach Bruce Weber said. "We want to have success here, there is no doubt."

In front of a purple crowd this season, the Wildcats have played at a new level. K-State is currently undefeated at 3-0

against ranked teams in front of a K-State crowd. Weber's squad is also undefeated in conference play when playing at Bramlage Coliseum.

There has not been a shortage of scoring on the road for the Wildcats. It has all boiled down to the defensive end for K-State on the road. At home, the Wildcats are holding Big 12 opponents to just over 62 points per game. Away from Manhattan, K-State has surrendered an average of just over 72 points per game. The 10 point difference may not seem like an astronomical difference, but three of the Wildcats' four road losses have come by 10 points or less.

"We use our crowd and our energy to help us on defense and our offense so we usually play pretty good in front of them," junior forward Thomas Gipson said.

There was no shortage of excitement the last time these two teams squared off. In the first matchup, it was the Longhorns upsetting the Wildcats in Austin, Texas when junior forward Jonathan Holmes drilled a 3-pointer at the buzzer to give the Longhorns the win.

Weber said, "We want to have success here, there is no doubt."

"To be honest, I fell asleep and it was pretty much my fault," Gipson said. "Coach asked me what happened and

Tipoff is set for 12:30.

Wildcats matchup well against Longhorns; Saturday could be 'instant classic'

By AUSTIN EARL
THE COLLEGIAN

On Jan. 21, the K-State Wildcats played the Texas Longhorns in the two teams' first meeting of the season. The game ended in a heart-breaking buzzer beater by Texas junior forward Jonathan Holmes that won the game for the Longhorns.

The sequel will be played on Saturday in Bramlage Coliseum. The teams matchup well together and could provide another instant classic in a 2014 Big 12 season that has already been full of great games.

Back court: Texas

Holmes is the Longhorns' leading scorer. He scores 13.7

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By the Numbers

By BRANDON PAINTER
THE COLLEGIAN**2-1** K-State's record against Texas basketball**1.9** The number of seconds left in the game when Texas inbounded the ball and Jonathan Holmes put up the game-winning shot.

The game looked to heading into overtime when Shane Southwell made a fundamental layup with five seconds left. The Longhorns pushed it up to half court and called a timeout. After a scrappy couple of seconds, Holmes wet the hoop from the corner, putting another tally in their win column.

13.9 Points per game average for star freshman Marcus Foster.

After all, K-State fans do claim to "own Texas." This is an important figure to keep track of. Let's see if the Wildcats can improve this to 3-1 as they take on the Longhorns here in Manhattan on Saturday at 12:30 p.m.

7 Wins in a row for the rolling Longhorns. Texas has nestled into a cozy 2nd place in the Big 12. With a better road record than the potent Kansas Jayhawks at 5-1, the Longhorns are looking to hold firm in Bramlage and keep their win streak alive.**15** Texas' current ranking in the AP Poll. Last time these two competed, K-State was ranked No. 22 in the country and Texas was unranked. Things have changed quite a bit in a few short weeks.

PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Freshman forward **Marcus Foster** shouts at teammates during the waning minutes of the second half of the Wildcats' 72-66 victory over the No. 25 Oklahoma Sooners Jan. 14 in Bramlage Coliseum. Foster led the Wildcats with 18 points, even after injuring his finger early in the game.

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POWERCAT PROFILE

WILL SPRADLING

By SPENCER LOW
THE COLLEGIAN

Sometimes it seems like a player has been around forever. Today's iteration of college basketball rarely sees players spend four years as a contributor on a college team. But when a player manages to play – and play well – for four years, he or she is an aberration.

Will Spadling is an aberration.

"He's played a lot of games, a lot of minutes. I think sometimes people take him for granted, he just does so much," head coach Bruce Weber said. "You can play him at the point, you can play him at the two. He plays great, he has great awareness on defense. He just knows what you're doing ahead of time."

In the 2010-11 season, Spadling's freshman campaign, he was one of four players to see action in every game. The next year, he was one of two players to start every game. During his junior season, his stretch of 96 consecutive games and 62 straight starts was brought to an end, but he still managed 33 starts in 34 appearances.

This season, he has started all 22 games so far. Barring injury, he will continue to start for the rest of the season. The Overland Park native signed with the Wildcats as a junior in high school at Shawnee Mission South, and began to make an impact right away. He averaged 6.4 points per game playing largely from the bench as a freshman. He quickly became known for his penchant for drawing charges as he led the team with 21.

As a sophomore, he transitioned into a starting role and saw his numbers rise. He put up 9.3 points per game, along with 2.8 assists. He once again led the team in charges drawn with 26. He also shot a team-high 82 percent from the free throw line, which has long been a point of trouble for the Wildcats.

Last season, he averaged 7.4 points per game. His free throw percentage rose to a team-high 86.4 percent, and he once again led the team with 14 charges drawn. His 2.41 assist-to-turnover ratio led the team and is tied for third highest all-time in K-State single-season history.

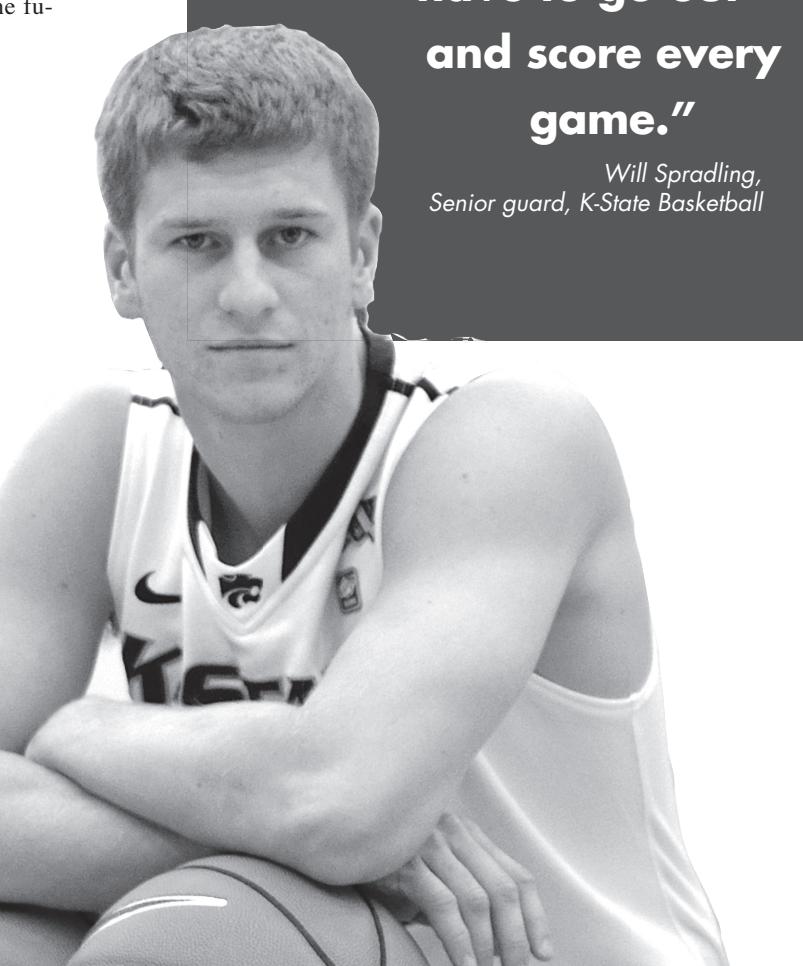
After finding such quick success, many thought that he might become an elite scorer, or an elite passer, but that is not who Spadling is. His game is not limited to excelling at one or two quantitative statistical categories, but rather doing what is asked of him game in and game out.

He displays a high basketball I.Q. and is the floor general that every team needs.

"I just do whatever it takes to win, and that doesn't

meant that I have to go out and score every game," Spadling said. "There's games where I might not have put up the points and some other games where I did put up the points."

Four years ago, when K-State was starting to rise in the world of college basketball, Spadling played a huge part in the continuation of that rise to prominence. That is where he sees his legacy as a Wildcat, and that is exactly where it will reside in the future.



"I just do whatever it takes to win, and that doesn't mean that I have to go out and score every game."

Will Spadling,
Senior guard, K-State Basketball

PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

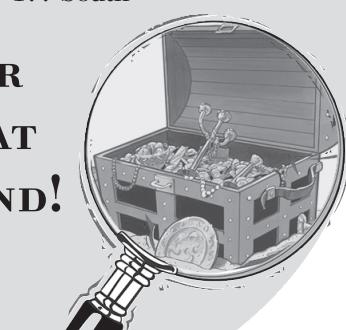
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